

DEBUSSY'S DOUZE ETUDES: AN EXAMINATION
OF NOS. 1 AND 2.

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
DEBUSSY'S DOUZE ETUDES: AN EXAMINATION OF NOS. 1 AND 12
by
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Historical Background

The outbreak of the first World War had a profound effect on Claude Debussy (1862-1918), plunging him into a state of depression and pessimism. Composition to him seemed such a senseless occupation during that time of anguish. On August 8, 1914, in a letter to his publisher Durand, Debussy writes:

You know that I have no sang-froid and still less anything of the army spirit. I've never even handled a rifle. My recollections of 1870 and the anxiety of my wife, whose son and son-in-law are in the army, prevent me from developing any enthusiasm. All this brings about an intense, agitated state of mind and I feel I am nothing but a mere atom crushed to pieces in this terrible cataclysm. What I am doing seems so wretchedly small. I've got to the state of envying Satie who, as a corporal, is really going to defend Paris.¹

In November, 1914, Debussy wrote the Berceuse héroïque, a simple piano piece which he scored for orchestra in the month of December. With this exception, Debussy abstained from all compositional activity for a whole year.

By 1915, the cancer that was eventually to kill Debussy was progressing rapidly and he was certainly aware that his illness was fatal. In July of that year, Debussy was offered stay at a cottage on the coast of Normandy. By this time, Debussy had come to realize that in his silence, he too was becoming a casualty of the war. In



a letter to his friend Robert Godet, he writes:

I have come to the conclusion that, all things considered, it would be cowardice on my part to join the ranks of the disabled, and spend my time dwelling on the atrocities that have been committed, without reacting against them by creating, to the best of my ability, a little of that beauty which the enemy is attacking with such fury.²

Soon after, on October 14, he writes Mr. Godet:

At long last I have got back the power and, as it were, the right, to think in terms of music-- a thing that has not happened to me for the last year. It is, of course, not indispensable that I should write music, but it is the only thing I can do more or less well; I humbly regret my state of latent death. Now, I have been writing like a madman, or one who has to die next morning.³

It is in this last burst of creative energy, which, as Edward Lockspeiser puts it, "took the form of a defiance of death,"⁴ that the Etudes were written. During his three short months spent on the coast, Debussy also wrote En blanc et noir, and two of the three sonatas, those for cello and piano, and for flute, viola and harp.

The early months of 1915 saw Debussy concentrating primarily on the revision of the piano works of Chopin, in preparation for a new edition of the works of Chopin to be published by Durand. This undoubtedly inspired Debussy to write his own set of twelve etudes for the piano later that year. After considerable hesitation as to their dedication (Debussy could not decide whether to dedicate his Etudes to Couperin or to Chopin, both for whom he had great admiration), the Douze Etudes were finally dedicated "à la mémoire de Frédéric Chopin."

Style

The Etudes have been cited by several authors, including Nadia Boulanger, as manifestations of the composer's declining technique and judgment owing to his rapidly failing health. Mlle. Boulanger states that "Debussy's last compositions are frankly inferior, but this is not strange, since they were written under the strain of the war and the steady progress of an incurable disease."⁵ Perhaps Mlle. Boulanger has misinterpreted a change of style which took place during the war.

Donald J. Grout defines "Impressionism" as a kind of program music and describes the Etudes as being "far from 'impressionistic',"⁶ a term often used to describe Debussy's music. E. Robert Schmitz sees the last Preludes of the second book as paving the way for the Etudes and previewing the style to come. Alfred Cortot sees Debussy's last works as examples of a third style in which the musical texture is the only interest. Of the Etudes, he states: "In tone combinations . . . there are here to be met a whole range of unexpected pianistic effects, seeming still more striking and original because there is no suggestion of any literary idea to explain their daring novelty."⁷ The Harvard Dictionary of Music also states that with En blanc et noir, the Etudes, and the late sonatas, Debussy "developed a more impersonal style indicative of neo-classical trends."⁸

We see in these late works a return to non-descriptive titles and the "old forms" as Debussy called them. In a short preface to a series of lectures on French music written in December 1916, Debussy provides the remedy for the German tyranny to which his fellow French

musicians had so long submitted. "Let us get back our freedom and our own forms," he writes. "Since we ourselves invented most of them, it is only right that we should preserve them; there are none more beautiful... ."9 "French musicians, he believed, should be encouraged to revive the spirit of the eighteenth century."¹⁰

With regards to En blanc et noir, Debussy claimed that the two piano work had only to do with "the sonority of the piano," and in a letter to Stravinsky dated October 24, 1915, he said, "recently I have written nothing but pure music, twelve etudes and two sonatas for different instruments, in our old form which, very graciously, did not impose any tetralogical auditory efforts,"¹¹

Indeed in these late works, it would seem that Debussy was entering a new phase as a composer, even though bridges are not entirely burnt in En blanc et noir or the Etudes. The poetic mottoes found at the beginning of the three pieces of En blanc et noir, the war sounds, and the symbolic use of a German chorale in the second piece testify to this. With regard to the Etudes, familiar features of Debussy's musical language are found in plenty. The streams of seventh and ninth chords, melodies in the form of short motives, narrow in range, the use of bitonality, polytonality, medieval modes, pentatonism, pedal points, ostinati, and his precision for rhythmic detail and dynamics are elements which are plentiful in his earlier works as well. The parody in "pour les 'cinq doigts' (d'après Monsieur Czerny)" also illustrates the fact that his detachment from extra-musical stimuli was not yet complete. With the Etudes though, Debussy is "no longer . . . content purely to crystallise the sensations of his nerve-ends, as he

plainly was in such a prelude as Brouillards."¹²

Development of the Etude

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians defines the term Study (FR. *étude*) as "an instrumental piece usually of some difficulty and most often for a stringed keyboard instrument, designed primarily to exploit and perfect a chosen facet of performing technique, but the better for having some musical intent."¹³

Etudes are "instructive pieces" and though the title "Etude" or its equivalent is seldom found in early keyboard music, much of the repertory is didactic in aim. The etude in effect developed out of a combination of elements found in eighteenth century toccatas, preludes, Handstücke, and various keyboard methods and treatises (Couperin's preludes in L'Art de toucher le clavecin 1716, the Probestücke in C.P.E. Bach's Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen 1753). The toccatas of A. Scarlatti or B. Pasquini are often etude-like, often technically brilliant, and contain extended usage of stereotyped passages. Though the term "study" was used occasionally in the eighteenth century, pieces which include the term in the title usually do not fall into the above definition of the term. Domenico Scarlatti's 30 Essercizi per gravicembalo (1738), for example, are no different in scope and significance from his other sonatas.

Muzio Clementi's Préludes et Exercises (1790), and Cramer's 84 Etudes (1804, 1810) are the first significant examples of the modern etude for pianoforte. Due to the growing popularity of the piano in the early nineteenth century, volumes of graded etudes aimed at the



amateur pianist appeared, of which the collections of Clementi, Cramer, and Czerny are typical. Though musically uninteresting, the fact that these collections are still widely used today illustrates their technical usefulness. After all, one must remember that these works were intended for the practice room and not the concert hall.

The later studies in Clementi's collection Gradus ad Parnassum (1817-1826) and Moscheles' Studien op. 70 (1826) are musically more interesting and illustrate the move towards the concert study. It wasn't until Chopin, though, that the etude finally embodied the greatest technical difficulties with outstanding musicality. His 24 etudes (1833, 1837) are usually cited as the crowning glory of the genre. With Liszt, piano technique is pushed to its furthest limits, particularly in the Transcendental Etudes (1852). Some of the technical features which figure prominently in Liszt's piano music are massive chords often moving rapidly up and down the keyboard, the recitative-cadenza, double trills, and rapid shifts in registers. Though notable collections of etudes have been written by later composers (the twenty-six studies of Skryabin (1887-1908) and Rachmaninov's two sets of Etudes Tableaux op. 33, 1911, and op. 39, 1916-17), the concept of the study as both a concert piece and technical study developed no further after Liszt.

Debussy's concept of the genre is similar to that established by Chopin; viz., "designed not only for study but also for public performance and . . . combines technical difficulty with high artistic quality."¹⁴ As mentioned earlier, features of Debussy's musical language are readily apparent here, but more than his predecessors who

wrote in the genre, Debussy uses the etude to explore the sonority of the piano through the technical particularities encountered in his other piano works. That is not to say that Liszt, as for example in his various collections of Etudes, does not explore the tonal possibilities of the piano to a very large degree, but his musical language is different, and the aspect of particular sonorities is not his primary concern as it is with Debussy.

General Description of the Etudes

Each etude is devoted to overcoming some particular difficulty and all twelve etudes show Debussy's concern with sonority to a greater or lesser extent. The first book deals with the digital mechanism:

- I pour les "cinq doigts" (For the Five Fingers)
- II pour les Tierces (For Thirds)
- III pour les Quartes (For Fourths)
- IV pour les Sixtes (For Sixths)
- V pour les Octaves (For Octaves)
- VI pour les huit doigts (For the Eight Fingers)

The second book is for the most part a study in sonorities and timbres:

- VII pour les Degrés chromatiques (For Chromatic Intervals)
- VIII pour les Agréments (For Grace Notes)
- IX pour les Notes répétées (For Repeated Notes)
- X pour les Sonorités opposées (For Contrasting Sonorities)
- XI pour les Arpèges composés (For Extended Arpeggios)
- XII pour les Accords (For Chords)

The letters to Durand show that the twelve studies were written between August 5 and September 29, 1915. The letters enable us to follow Debussy's progress with the Etudes and contain many interesting comments, especially on the more novel ones. In one letter, Debussy mentions the study in sixths:

For a long time, continuous passages in sixths made me think of affected young ladies sitting sulkily in a drawing-room listening enviously to the wanton laughter of the giddy ninths... . I am now writing a study in which the sixth plays such an important part that the harmonies consist entirely of combinations of these intervals-- and it isn't ugly. (Mea culpa . . .)¹⁵

Of the etude in fourths, Debussy says: "you will find effects you have never heard before, despite the fact that your ears are inured to all sorts of strange sounds."¹⁶ It is indeed a very refreshing study with Debussy's organum-like treatment of the double fourth, a harmonic taboo of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

"Pour les Agréments" is a study based on various forms of embellishments or ornaments and gives new life to a "worn-out device," Debussy writes. It is "not for the 'entertainment'¹⁷ of pianists, the facetious virtuosi will say. It takes the form of a 'Barcarolle' on a rather Italian sea."¹⁸

"Pour les huit doigts" is a moto perpetuo study based on ascending and descending patterns of four notes, all played without the use of the thumb.

Etude X is a study in contrasting sonorities. E. Robert Schmitz provides this description:

The purpose [of this study] . . . is the differentiation and simultaneous usage of timbres in relation to differentiated coloring intents expressed in scoring,

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the properties of the function $f(x)$ defined by the equation

$$f(x) = \int_0^x \frac{1}{1+t^2} dt$$

It is shown that the function $f(x)$ is increasing and concave down on the interval $(-\infty, \infty)$.

2. In the second part, we consider the function $g(x)$ defined by the equation

$$g(x) = \int_0^x \frac{1}{1+t^4} dt$$

It is shown that the function $g(x)$ is increasing and concave down on the interval $(-\infty, \infty)$.

3. Finally, we consider the function $h(x)$ defined by the equation

harmony, and so forth. That this conception applies to all his piano works is true; the [tenth] etude is only a "concentrated" study of the phenomenon, the various aspects of which are applicable here, or there, depending on effect and texture.¹⁹

"Pour les Arpèges composés" is a beautiful study for compounded or combined arpeggi with certain humorous aspects found particularly in the middle section. This digression from the soft flow of the opening section contains jocular rhythms, two and three note appoggiaturas (Example 1), and humorous question and answer phrases (Example 2).



Example 1. "Pour les Arpèges composés," mm. 29-30.



Example 2. "Pour les Arpèges composés," mm. 40-44.

On September 30, Debussy was able to write: "Last night at midnight I copied out the last note of the Studies. Phew! The most minute Japanese print is child's play by comparison with the writing of some of the pages: but I am pleased, it is good work."²⁰ In dedicating them to the memory of Chopin, Debussy knew comparisons would be made, which, he writes, would be "inevitably to my disadvantage," yet, he concludes, "without false modesty I may say that they will acquire a place of their own."²¹ Debussy was well aware of the extreme difficulty of some of these studies, which, he wrote, "terrify your fingers... . You may be sure that mine sometimes halt at certain passages... . Apart from the question of technique, these 'Etudes' will be a useful warning to pianists not to take up the musical profession unless they have remarkable hands."²²

It is interesting to note Debussy's unusual preface to the Etudes. Debussy's re-editing of Chopin's piano works is free of analytical notes, suggestions for interpretation, and fingering modifications, and the preface to the Etudes is a pointed instance of this dislike for pedagogical suggestions or any indication that smacks of the academic (e.g. fingering):²³

The fingering is intentionally omitted in these "Etudes" and here briefly is the reason:

It is obvious that the same fingering cannot suit differently shaped hands. The modern method of writing several fingerings over one another is supposed to solve the difficulty, but it results only in confusion... . It makes the music look like a queer sum in arithmetic in which the fingers, by some inexplicable phenomenon, have to be multiplied by one another... .

Our old masters-- I mean "our own" admirable clavecinists-- never marked the fingering; no doubt because they had confidence in the ingenuity of their



contemporaries. It would be unseemly to mistrust the skill of our modern virtuosi.

To sum up: the absence of fingering provides excellent practice, it abolishes the spirit of contradiction which prompts us to avoid the composer's fingering, and proves the truth of the old saying "If you want a thing well done, do it yourself."

Let us seek our fingering!²⁴

We shall now examine in more detail, two of the etudes: "pour les 'cinq doigts' (d'après Monsieur Czerny)" from the first book, and "pour les Accords" from book II.

CHAPTER II

Analysis

Etude I "pour les 'cinq doigts' (d'après Monsieur Czerny)"

"Pour les 'cinq doigts' (d'après Monsieur Czerny)" provides an appropriate and humorous beginning to Debussy's set of etudes. A five finger study is a logical starting point from the technical side because this simple scale pattern is the basis of all passage work. It is from here that one derives scales (by adding the passage of the thumb), or, with additional spacing between the fingers, one derives arpeggio passages, and from these, the conception of chordal playing.²⁵

"Pour les 'cinq doigts'", written in the same spirit as Debussy's "Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum" from Children's Corner, is a sophisticated parody of a Czerny five-finger exercise (Czerny's op. 740, no. 1 in particular comes to mind). Debussy transforms the study into a fanciful gigue which conjures up pictures of a diligent student carefully practising his five-finger exercise, who, after becoming bored with it, decides to have some fun. The marking Sagement at the beginning of the piece, though probably meant as a warning of "prudence" in choosing the tempo, helps to create this picture of the well behaved, "sage" little student at the piano.

On November 10, 1917, Marguerite Long gave the first performance of a group of the Debussy Etudes and gives this account:

At the concert I had hardly begun the scale passage of the first "Etude," "Pour les cinq doigts," when a tiresome lady in the audience, remembering no doubt the scales of her youth, indignantly exclaimed, "Well, I never! If it were not signed by Debussy . . .!"²⁶

Formally, this piece can be divided into six sections:²⁷

	A	B	C	D	E	F
measures	1-27	28-47	48-66	67-74	75-96	97-116

Though thematic material is re-used, it is varied and used in a passing way. The listener does not sense repetition. Instead, the formal effect is one of constant variety. Richard Parks describes this formal category as one in which a piece evolves through developing variation, each section being different, at least superficially.²⁸

Compare, for example, measures 21-27 with a varied and abbreviated version in measures 65-66, or measures 28-31 with: 1) measures 67-68, which is abbreviated; 2) measures 99-100, also abbreviated and significantly altered; and 3) measures 103-110, which includes additions, alterations, and expansions of the original four-bar idea, leading to the final cadence on the tonic. Authentic cadences initiate sections **B**, **D**, and **F**. Sections **C** and **E** are defined by sufficiently contrasting material as well as new tonal centres.

This etude is, as are the others, emphatically tonal. C major is clearly the tonal centre here, or as Schmitz describes, "C major is the canvas (as in 'Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum') upon which the various harmonic colors are embroidered... ." ²⁹ Though the impression conveyed is one of diatonicism, bitonality and polytonality abound throughout. Following is an outline of the principal tonal changes:

Measures 1- 6: The opening C major five-finger exercise with a contradicting A flat provides the first example of bitonality.

Measures 7-10: Three consecutive diminished seventh chords move finally to the dominant seventh of C major.

Measures 11-16: The first bars seem to indicate a shift to G as tonal centre, as the five-finger exercise now begins on G, but measures 15 and 16 confirm this section to be still in C major and once again bitonal references occur between the right and left hand in measures 12 and 14 with the alternation of C major and F-sharp major.

Measures 17-27: Consecutive diminished sevenths arrive eventually at dominant harmony in C major at measure 27, and cadence to I in measure 28 to begin section **B**.

Measures 28-34: Clearly in C major to begin with but soon, at measure 32, there is a conflict with E-flat major.

Measures 35-40: Pattern revolves around a C pedal point. Then in measure 37, the C pedal takes on a dominant of F major effect as a B flat is inserted. Finally, in measures 39-40, the pedal moves to D with F sharp inserted to prepare the tonality of G major.

Measures 41-47: G major, but interrupted at measure 44 and 47 by D-flat major.

Measures 48-55: The key signature indicates C-flat major and the melody in the right hand (beginning measure 50) clearly indicates this, but the left-hand ostinato pulls strongly to G flat as the tonal centre thus producing a tonic over dominant effect.

Measures 56-74: C major is the canvas with a brief "interruption" of this tonality occurring in measures 63-64.

Measures 75-89: Here the tonal centre is difficult to trace but seems to centre around D flat. Polytonality abounds in rapid succession as the quick changes in the right hand oppose the steady pedal trill on D flat.

Measures 90-96: Measure 90 in F major takes us to six bars of cadenza-like writing consisting of rapid consecutive ascending-descending five-note figures. Measure 91 (with 5 sequences in measures 92-96) consists of four scale fragments, each with different tonal centres (G-flat major, G major, D-flat major, and D minor). Schmitz describes this procedure with the term "successive polytonality."³⁰

Measures 97-110: C major is the tonal centre with E-flat major contradictions in measures 98 and 102.

Measures 111-116: A rapid scale on the Neapolitan (D-flat major scale) lands immediately on the C major, final tonic chords.

Following is a graphic representation of the tonal changes in
 "pour les cinq doigts:"

measures 1-6 7-10 11-16 17-27

28-34 35-47 48-55 56-74

75-89 90 91-96 97-110 111-116

Example 3. Tonal graph of "pour les cinq doigts."

Thematically, the work draws mainly from two melodic figures: the five-note scale figure of the opening bar (Example 4), and the descending arpeggio figure embellished by neighbour notes, found for the first time in measure 7 (Example 5).

Sagement

PIANO *p ben legato* |

Example 4. "Pour les cinq doigts," m.1.



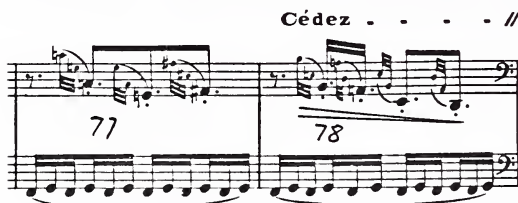
Example 5. "Pour les cinq doigts," m.7.

A detailed look at the usage of these figures throughout this work is not necessary for the purpose of this paper. It will suffice to mention once again that, though the treatment of thematic material is motivic, the motives are varied, expanded, and juxtaposed to such an extent that the result is an impression of continuous variety and not one of constant repetition.

There is a tendency in the Etudes for the texture to be rather light, which is the case with the first etude. It maintains basically a two-voice texture throughout with occasional expansions, which occur, for example, in measures 21-27 or measures 32-34. Overall, both voices assume equal importance in that both share equally in the thematic material. An exception to this can be found in the first part of section E (measures 75-84) where the lower voice clearly "accompanies" the melodic material in the upper voice.

Some of the devices Debussy uses in this etude which help create special effects in sonority are: ornamentation, pedal points, and rapid dynamic contrasts. Specifically, appoggiaturas are used in various forms. In measures 32, 33, and 34, for example, the right-hand

sixteenth notes function as grace notes to their succeeding dotted eighth note chord and contain key notes in defining their respective tonal interruptions within the C major context. The grace notes in measures 77, 78, 80, 81, and 82, written in small notes, also contain key notes which are effective in highlighting the bitonality and polytonality in this section. Particularly striking are the chains of open-space harmony formed by the appoggiaturas (Example 6). Measures 12 and 14 contain grace notes which not only help to define the F-sharp contradiction in the right hand and punctuate the bitonality, but also serve as a device in creating the satirical humour which is at the heart of this etude.



Example 6. "Pour les cinq doigts," mm.77-78.

In measures 75-82, Debussy uses the pedal trill of the left hand to contrast the erratic character and constantly changing tonality of the right hand.

The rapid contrasts in dynamics occur every second measure on the average. Rapid changes in register also occur frequently, where, for example, one hand shifts one or two octaves at once (measures 44 and 47, measures 97-98). Most of all though, in this etude, it is

probably Debussy's use of a diatonic mood permeated by the frequent bitonal references, his use of successive polytonality, and occasional tonal interruptions, which is responsible for the particular sonority and effect of this work. Indications such as brusquement (measure 11) for example, indicate here Debussy's desire that the bitonality between the left and right hand be crisply illustrated. This delight in juxtaposing so called unrelated tonalities and harmonies for the sake of their "sound" effect is further exemplified in Etude XII which will be discussed next.

Etude XII "pour les Accords"

"Pour les Accords," the final etude in the set, provides a satisfying conclusion to the Douze Etudes. The power of the hammered-out chords in the first and last sections, the energy, rhythmic vigor, and wide dynamic range (piu pp to piu ff) contribute to the climactic effect of the piece, which successfully brings the Etudes to a close. From a technical standpoint, it is a study in the quick grasping of chords, as well as a study in simultaneous leaps in both hands in contrary motion. From a compositional and musical standpoint though, many interesting things are explored as we shall now examine.

"Pour les Accords" is set in a simple ternary design with a broad formal plan appearing as follows:³¹

	A	B	A ¹
measures	1-79	80-126	127-181

Each large section may in turn be divided into smaller units which reflect the principle of return as well.

A

a	a'	trans.	b	a''	codetta
1-18	19-32	33-38	39-53	54-69	70-79

B

c	d	c'	e	c''	codetta	trans.	A¹	a	a''	coda
80-83	84-86	87-90	91-95	96-102	103-104	105-126		127-144	145-160	161-181

The three large sections are defined mainly by the tonal design, texture, and dynamics.

Tonally, sections **A** and **A¹** centre around A minor for the most part, while section **B** is set in F-sharp major. Following is a closer discussion of the tonal changes:

Measures 1- 20: The tonality is definitely A minor, although at first glance it would appear otherwise. If one looks at the first three measures only, there are already four "unrelated" chords (F minor, A major, C minor, E major) which Debussy uses side by side purely for their "sound" effect. Even the tonic triad on A has been "altered" with a tierce de picardie to produce the particular sonority of the juxtaposition of major and minor triads. The tonality then, in this section, is defined by the melodic material which consists of the soprano notes of these chords.

Measures 21- 38: The feeling of A major slowly fades with the persistent pedal G in the right hand. This is actually a dominant pedal as C major is strongly confirmed with an authentic cadence in measures 32-33.

Measures 39- 53: This section continues in C major until measures 47-50 where it begins to break down and we arrive briefly at E major in measures 51-53.

Measures 54-79: At measure 54, sub-section "a" comes back, and with it, the return of the A-minor tonality which remains until section **B**.

Measures 80-104: The tonal centre is not strongly defined at the beginning of this middle section, but by measure 84, F-sharp major becomes apparent and remains throughout except for a brief interruption at measure 94 which is in C minor. Once again Debussy continues to juxtapose contrasting harmonies and isolates the lush sonorities of the ninth, thirteenth, and augmented chords (Example 7). As in the first etude, Debussy uses grace notes which help to define the F-sharp major tonality. These are chordal grace notes though and much quieter in character (Example 8).



Example 7. "Pour les Accords," m.95.



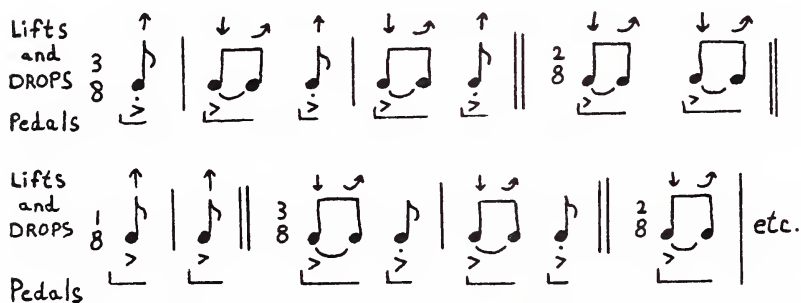
Example 8. "Pour les Accords," mm.80-81.

Measures 105-126: This section serves as a transition to bring us to the return of the A section. Beginning at measure 105, the strong F-sharp major tonality of the previous nine bars immediately begins to dissolve as the rhythmic pattern of the opening is introduced in the original key of A minor.

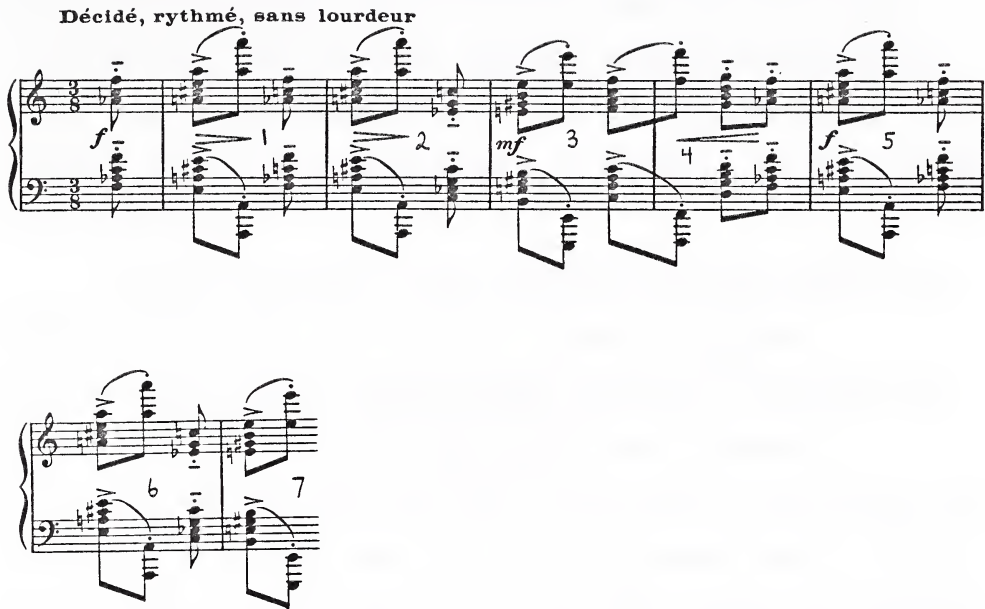
Measures 127-181: A minor continues until the end in this altered and incomplete return of the opening A section.

The element of rhythm is rather interesting in this piece and plays a definite form-defining role. The driving asymmetrical rhythms of the opening and closing sections are far from the calm and almost pulseless rhythm of the middle section. In examining the first few

bars of this piece, we find an asymmetric alternation of lifts and drops, and staccati and slurs. The opening upbeat chord is lifted, the second one (measure 1, beat 1) is dropped and slurred to the octaves which are sharp but short. The third beat is again lifted and the pattern is repeated until the third beat of measure three, where instead of lifting to another strong drop on the first beat and slur, it is itself a drop, which is slurred to the first beat of the fourth measure. The second and third beats of this fourth measure are both lifts which lead to the original alternation pattern of measures 1 and 2. This alternation in measures 5 and 6 is broken again at measure 7. Compare Schmitz' graphic illustration (Example 9a)³² of this alternation of binary and ternary metres in the opening seven measures with the original score (Example 9b).



Example 9a. "Pour les Accords." Graphic illustration of meter.



Example 9b. "Pour les Accords," mm.1-7.

The middle section (measures 80-126) on the other hand, sharply contrasts the rhythmic force of the outer sections with their accentuation and hemiola effect. Accent and regularity of pulse are avoided in section B. Motion is rather concentrated into clumps of short note-values separated by long notes or rests. Debussy seems content simply to dwell on and enjoy the lush sonorities of this section which is also characterized by frequent tempo changes. Thus through the exactitude of pitch duration and many tempo changes, Debussy achieves the freedom or rubato which he calls for in this section. The rubato, in effect, has been written in. Particularly noteworthy is the way in

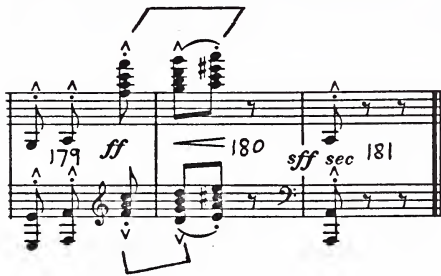
which section A returns. The rhythm of the opening returns slyly in the bass and from a distance (lointain) beginning at measure 105. Starting with single notes, then in octaves, the rhythm asserts itself gradually until a full chordal texture is reached and the return of the first section.

Dynamics also play a role in defining the outer sections and middle section. Sections A and A¹ are generally forte but not to be played heavily (sans lourdeur) as stated at the beginning. Section B on the other hand is pianissimo almost throughout.

The scoring of the first and last sections is rather heavy with chords of five to eight notes, the latter being most common. A great deal of doubling occurs (root, third, and fifth) creating very special sonorities. Triadic harmony clearly dominates, thus resulting in a predominantly consonant four-voice texture as the doubled notes do not constitute independent parts. The middle section maintains a four-voice chordal texture as well, but the scoring is lighter with four-note chords prevailing. There is greater harmonic tension in this section, though, and a minimum of doubling. With the exception of measures 105-122 where the melody and rhythm of the opening section return quietly in the bass, melodic material is reserved for the soprano in this piece.

Thematically, the interval of the third figures prominently, not only harmonically in the predominantly triadic harmony, but also as a melodic interval. This thematic motive can be found in nearly every figure which may be described as melodic. The melodic material in measures 1-7 (soprano) is based on the interval of a third. Measures

14-19 descend and ascend through a series of thirds. The melodic notes of measures 33-35 (first beats of each measure) are separated by the span of a third and filled out by passing chords. Once again, in measures 54-64 (similar to the opening), the third figures prominently. Even the middle section contains the third in melodic figures. In measure 95, the C sharp moves to A sharp in the soprano, and in measures 96-97 the G sharp moves to B sharp, separated by sixteenth note passing tones in the soprano. In measures 105-126, the interval figures strongly, both harmonically and melodically. The final chords of the piece reaffirm the importance of the third as well, in both the bass and soprano voices (Example 10). Even the relationship between the main tonalities of the outer sections and middle section (A minor, F-sharp minor) is the interval of a third. These are but some of the more obvious examples, as further examination would reveal, of Debussy's use of the third as a thematic motive.



Example 10. "Pour les Accords," mm. 179-181.

In conclusion, how are we to view the final etude, or the entire Douze Etudes, in the context of Debussy's entire compositional output? In an almost anti-Debussy gesture, he concludes his final work for solo piano with the "iron brutality"³³ of the chords in

"pour les Accords." "The limits of Debussy's art are wrenched apart in this study, and the conception is established of the piano as a percussive instrument, the instrument of the piano works not only of Stravinsky, but of Bartok and of Hindemith."³⁴ As mentioned previously, the Etudes reflect Debussy's turning away from the world of sensations, to that of abstract ideas (viz., traditional forms). Debussy seems to have exhausted the possibilities of expression in his earlier style and felt perhaps a need to return to procedures he had formerly condemned. His patriotic sentiment, further inspired by the war against the Germans, is responsible as well for his turning to traditional forms. Debussy's last sonatas, which he signed "Claude Debussy, musicien français," are characterized by a sense of balance, restraint, clarity, and the light texture characteristic of the Classical style.

One can only speculate as to what direction Debussy's music would have taken had he lived another ten or twenty years. Whether Debussy would have explored new possibilities or not, the aspect of colour and sonority in music would undoubtedly have remained the most important feature of his style. As Debussy once wrote in a letter to Jaques Durand, "I have come to see more and more that music is not, by nature, something which can be rigidly and traditionally structured. It is colours and metred time."³⁵

FOOTNOTES

¹Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, vol. 2, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 206.

²Leon Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, trans. Marie and Grace O'Brien (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 255.

³Ibid., p. 255.

⁴Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 212.

⁵Nadia Boulanger, "Lectures on Modern Music; Debussy: The Preludes," The Rice Institute Pamphlet, XIII (April, 1926), quoted in Richard Samuel Parks, "Organizational Procedures in Debussy's Douze Etudes" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1973), p. 2.

⁶Donald Jay Grout, A History of Western Music, rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), p. 654.

⁷Alfred Cortot, French Piano Music, trans. Hilda Andrews (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 34.

⁸Willi Apel, "Impressionism," Harvard Dictionary of Music, second ed., rev. and enl. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 404.

⁹Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, p. 251.

¹⁰Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 216.

¹¹Frank Dawes, Debussy Piano Music, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), p. 58.

¹²Ibid., p. 58.

¹³Howard Ferguson, "Etude," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1980), XVIII, 304-305.

¹⁴Apel, "Etude," Harvard Dictionary of Music, p. 300.

¹⁵Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, p. 258.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁷A play on the word agrément which means entertainment as well as musical ornaments.

¹⁸Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, p. 258.

¹⁹E. Robert Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), p. 215.

²⁰Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 212.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 212.

²²Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, pp. 258-259.

²³Cortot, French Piano Music, p. 32.

²⁴As translated and quoted in Vallas, Claude Debussy: His Life and Works, p. 257, with modifications and translation changes by the author.

²⁵Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy, p. 194.

²⁶Marquerite Long, At the Piano With Debussy, trans. Olive Senior-Ellis (London: J.M. Dent. & Sons Ltd., 1972), p. 46.

²⁷Please refer to the score of "pour les cinq doigts" in the Appendix for references to musical examples and measure numbers.

²⁸Richard Samuel Parks, "Organizational Procedures in Debussy's Douze Etudes" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1973), p. 554.

²⁹Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy, pp. 195-196.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 196.

³¹Please refer to the score of "pour les Accords" in the Appendix for references to musical examples and measure numbers.

³²A reproduction of the illustration in Schmitz, The Piano Works of Claude Debussy, p. 220.

³³Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy (The Master Musicians Series), (London: J.M. Dent. & Sons Ltd., 1980), p. 161.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁵Translated by the author from the French, as found in Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, vol. 2, p. 3.

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APPENDIX

Douze Etudes



LIVRE I

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

I - pour les "cinq doigts" d'après Monsieur Czerny.

Sagement

PIANO

p ben legato

1

2

3

4

Accelerando

(2/4)

(6/16) Animé (Mouvt de Gigu)

molto dim.

5

6

7

8

9

10

(4/4) 1^o Tempo*brusquement**simile**p*

11

12

13

p

14

15

mf e cresc.

(6/16) Animé

16

17

18

19

20

p

21

poco

22

poco

23

cresc.

24

25

26

27

(12)
16

dim. molto

28 *f* 29 30 31

Rubato - - - // **Mouvt** **Molto rubato** **Mouvt**

p 32 *rinf.* 33 *p* 34 *p leggiero legato* 35

36 *più p* 37 *pp* 38 *p* 39

p 40 *cresc.* 41 *f* 42 43

Rit. - - - // **Mouvt** *f* 44 *sf* *dim.* 45 *f* 46 *f* 47 *dim.*

Mouvt *pp leggerissima* 48 49 *pp* 50 51

52 53 54 55 *rinf.* *molto*

pp 56 57 58 59 *p*

60 61 *p* 62 63 *mf*

64 65 *p cresc.* *molto* 66 67 *f*

f 68 69 70 71 *p*

Mouvt *pp* 72 73 74 *più p* *Rubato* *Mouvt*

Cédez . . . //

Poco meno mosso

pp sempre 75 *p scherz.* 76 77 78

Tempo (meno mosso)

più pp 79 *pp* 80 81

Cédez . . . // Tempo (meno mosso)

82 *più pp* 83 *m.d.* 84

sempre pp 85 *sff* 86 *pp* 87

88 *sff* 89 *sff* 90 *p* *pp*

poco

poco

accelerando

e

cresc. . . .

ppp 91 92

molto cresc.

93 94 95

f 96 97 *Mouvt* (♩ = ♩)

98 99 100 101

102 103 104 105 *dim.*

106 107 *cresc.* 108 109 110

Strepitoso

111 *p cresc. subito molto* 112 *f* 113 114 115 116

XII - pour les accords

Décidé, rythmé, sans lourdeur

1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 9 10 11 12

13 14 15 16 17 18 19

20 21 22 23 24 25 26

27 28 29 30 31 32

mf *f* *dim.* *più dim.* *cre* *scen* *do* *p* *rinf.* *cresc.* *molto*

Poco allargando

8-11
sfz 33 sfz 34 sfz 35 sf 36 sff 37 *p marqué* sff 38 *p marqué*

in Tempo

p 39 40 p 41 42 p 43 44

p 45 *poco cresc.* 46 p 47 e cre 48 scen 49 do molto 50

Ritenuto ma con fuoco **au Mouvt**

51 sf 52 sfz p 53 p 54 55 mf 56

57 58 59 60 61 62

63 64 65 mf 66 67 mf dim. 68 69

Poco rit. - - - - - //

70 molto dim. 71 72 73 pp 74 75 76 77 78 79

Lento, molto rubato (la ♩ = à la ♩. précédente)

80 pp molto leggero 81 82 pp 83

Rit. - - - - - // a Tempo

84 m. g. poco marc. 85 p 86 più pp sempre pp 87

Poco stretto - - - - - // a Tempo

88 89 90 molto pp 91

dolce sostenuto

Poco stretto rit. - - - - - // a Tempo

92 p 93 pp 94 più pp

Rit. - - - - - // a Tempo

Poco stretto

95 7pp più pp 96 pp 97 98 pp 99

Rit. - - - // a Tempo
sensibile
dolcissimo

100 101 102 103

pp

Rit. - - // $\left(\frac{3}{8}\right)$ **1er Mouvt**

104 105 106 107 108 109 110

sempre pp (lointain)

111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118

pp

un poco accel.

119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126

cre *scen* *do* *molto*

1er Mouvt

127 128 129 130 131 132

mf

133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140

dim. *piu dim.*

141 *cre* 142 *scen* do 143 144 145 146

mf 147 148 149 150 151 152 153

154 155 156 *mf* 157 *mf* 158 *dim.* 159 160

161 *molto dim.* 162 163 164 *p* 165 166 *cresc.* 167

168 *f* 169 *p* 170 *più pp* 171 172 *p* 173 174

175 *cresc.* 176 *f* 177 *f* 178 *f* 179 *ff* 180 *fff sec* 181

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